

## Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

You know, I'd really like to speak on the fish story I just read you.

Nobody loves a good joke more than I do,

and I think today's Gospel is the funniest story in the whole Bible.

Sometimes we're so intent on reading the Bible as if it were all

pious/holy...

that we miss the humor and earthiness of it.

Today's Gospel is a fish story.

Imagine the fisherman, Simon telling us what happened:

"So, we're out in the boat all day and haven't caught nothin'.

So, we go back to shore and are cleaning out the nets,

which is a total waste of time 'cause like I said, we hadn't caught nothin',

when Jesus comes up and tells us to put out to the deep waters.

I figure he just wants to get away from all the idiots who keep bugging him...

to heal somebody or turn water into wine,

but he's a good guy, so we take him out.

Well, we no sooner get out there, than we got ourselves knee-deep in mackerel!

We got so many fish they're spilling out of the sides,

so we call our friends over...

and soon they can't turn around in their boats either for all the

fish.

No, really!

Well, the boats begin to go down — from all the weight, you know.

And I turn to Jesus and say, ‘Leave me alone.

Your magic’s gonna’ be the death of all us all.

I’m just a poor, sinful fisherman.’

And you know what he says?

‘Don’t sweat it. Someday, I’m gonna’ make you guys fishers of men.’

Fishers of men! Get it? Fishers of men...that’s a good one!

Hey, did you hear about the time we couldn’t catch anything...

and Jesus said, ‘Put your nets over on this side’?

And I said, ‘Yea, Lord. I heard that one already:

Two guys go out and catch their limit,

and the one guy says, ‘Be sure and mark this spot,’

so the other guy puts a big “X” on the side of the boat!

Man, that Jesus is a stitch!”

Well, I’d like to talk about fish stories today,

but if you were listening closely to the Old Testament reading,

you probably have a few questions you need answered first.

It’s a very disturbing passage. It is the story of the prophet Isaiah...

receiving his commission to go out and speak the word of the Lord.

What’s disturbing is the word that God wants Isaiah to proclaim.

What a vision Isaiah presents us with!

The Lord God Almighty sitting on a throne in a robe that fills the whole temple.

That’s some robe! Maria’s train in the wedding scene/Sound of Music...

didn’t fill the whole church.

And his attendants are cooler than the flying monkeys of the...

Wicked Witch/West in The Wizard of Oz (and they were pretty

cool!).

The seraphim have 6 pairs of wings:

an extra 2 to hide their faces and another 2 to hide their feet.

I don’t know why heavenly attendants would want to hide their faces/feet,

but it sure would make them look spookier than a bunch of...

Hollywood monkeys with wings pasted on their backs!

Picture these huge figures all wrapped in wings hovering around a gigantic throne.

And they’re calling to each other through the wings:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full/his glory.”

And the room is filled w/ Hollywood smoke, like a bad Frankenstein movie,

and the whole place is shaking like the ship's ballroom in Titanic.

Let me tell you, if I ever found myself knee-deep in robe, peering through smoke,

listening to the muffled calls of flying wing-covered creatures,  
trying to keep my balance 'cause the whole place is shaking,  
I'd be thinking it was all over for me.

Actually, this was Isaiah's thinking, too, only his 1<sup>st</sup> thoughts concerned those seraphim.

Exactly why were their hands and feet covered?

The only reason he could come up with was that they felt unworthy...  
to have their faces/feet viewed by such a holy being as the Lord of  
hosts.

And if they weren't worthy....

Fortunately, the seraphs knew what to do:

they brought him a piece of coal from the altar to purify him.

One of them said, "Now that this has touched your lips,  
your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out."

Wow! Wouldn't you like some of this coal?

Wouldn't it be great if we could find something that we could raise to our lips...  
that would allow us to be forgiven and freed from guilt?

We do have such a thing. We receive it every week during Communion.  
It's interesting that, in Isaiah, it's the lips that condemn.

I don't know how much things have changed, but when I was in junior high,  
it wasn't necessary to travel to some remote African village...

or study life among the primates to witness humanity in its natural  
state.

You just had to visit any junior high, preferably at lunchtime.

Now, sure, we punched, pulled, and kicked,

but the real damage we did to each other was with our mouths; wasn't it?

It was the rumors we started, the lies we told,

and the names we called each other that really hurt.

I suspect that this hasn't changed much in middle schools today...

b/c as adults we continue to use our tongues as weapons against each  
other.

It's appropriate that our lips first receive the bread and wine at Communion...

b/c that is where our sin is located: in our tongues and in the minds that move  
them.

When the seraph touched the burning coal to Isaiah's lips, he was changed  
forever.

To God's question, "Whom shall I send to deliver my message to the people,"

Isaiah immediately said, "Here I am; send me!"

I'd like to think that this is the first thing we'd say.

I'm afraid we'd tend to relish in our newfound freedom for awhile...

before we'd offer to serve the one who freed us.

How do I know this? From years of experience at Communion tables.

I've heard people express relief/gratitude at having been released from the burdens..

they took up with them, but I've never seen anyone show any desire...

to go streaking out of the church to serve the one who released them.

We take the bread or wafers as if they were Alka Seltzer rather than No Doze...

and the wine as if it was Pepto Bismol rather than Tobasco sauce.

They settle our stomachs more than they get us moving.

But Isaiah caught the fire and begged to be allowed to spread it.

Now, to this point, this is a straight commissioning story,

not much different from the story of Jesus calling Simon Peter/the other disciples.

But here's where it gets weird.

We expect God to tell Isaiah to warn the people to change their lives or else.

Instead he says, "Tell them to keep ignoring me/keep on going as they are."

Isaiah probably hopes this is one of those tricks...

that parents play on their kids to "teach them a lesson."

My mom let me run away from home one time.

As she watched from the window,

I put all of my earthly belongings in my little wagon and headed off.

I stopped at the curb, turned around and came back in the house crying.

When she asked me why I came back, I sobbed,

"Because I'm not allowed to cross the street alone!"

This is undoubtedly what Isaiah was hoping for.

God would let the Jewish people continue on their own...

until they realized their own limitations and come back for help.

But this isn't what God had in mind at all.

God was going to let the Jewish nation fall. Only a faithful few would survive.

These would become a "holy seed" through which G could raise a new nation.

God doesn't send us out that we might make some gentle suggestions...

to the architects of this world on how they can build their towers straighter.

This is the reason a Christian coalition to advise world leaders doesn't work.

God's going to let the architects/this world keep building higher and higher until...

their structures collapse of their own accord b/c their foundations are so rotten

and the plans so faulty that nothing of value can be built upon them.

Once they do fall, then, God can start rebuilding upon what remains:

the holy seed, those willing to spread the gospel.

When we receive our burning coal in the sacrament of Holy Communion,

and go out and spread the good news of JC in all that we say and all that we do,

we serve the master builder,

the one who will make of this fallen world a new kingdom.

Don't distress that things seem to be falling apart;

rejoice that when they finally collapse,

something glorious will be built out of the rubble.

And that's no fish story!